

# FACE TO FACE WITH EMMANUELA: REFLECTIONS ON THE USES OF THE MEMOIR IN EXPLORING THE LIFE STORY OF A NINETEENTH CENTURY WOMAN TEACHER

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**Abstract** – *This paper is concerned with ‘A little Memoir of a Good and Pious Woman Educator’, namely Emmanuela Azzopardi, a headteacher living in the second half of nineteenth century Malta. The memoir – written by Canon Paolo Pullicino, the Director of Education at that time – is a very important one as it uniquely tells the story of a woman’s life, outlining the official duties of the teacher and defining her ideal characteristics. My interests in this particular archive do not only lie in examining the virtues expected of the woman teacher; a reading which is very useful in tracing the formation of the teacher as we know it today. Feminist poststructuralist theories lead me to question the uses of the memoir itself, its politics of representation and the spaces it opens for the theoretical considerations of the portrayal of this teacher. As a feminist exploring knowledge/ power and gender relations, I will be discussing issues of women’s voice and representations, particularly the possible uses of the space created by the memoir for subversive purposes.*

## Introduction

**W**hat follows is a description of Emmanuela Azzopardi, a Maltese headteacher of the primary school in Valletta in the second half of the nineteenth century, found in a memoir<sup>1</sup> written by Canon Paolo Pullicino, the Director of Education, in 1871:

‘A Little Memoir of the Life of a Good and Pious Woman Educator

Retaining her confidence in God, she modestly took up (1<sup>st</sup> November 1857) the new and delicate position, which she retained until her death. She always remained faithful and careful to promptly follow the directions of her superiors. She was careful not to betray her conscience that obliged her to promote the material as well as the spiritual needs of her female students; making use of her own position not so much for personal gain but more as a means by which she could do good to others.

And she managed to do this in a marvellous way. A proof of this is the constant excellent results of her labours. And this could clearly be observed

mostly in the annual examinations. These always satisfied the requirements set down by the regulations. Her classes were many times greatly admired by various famous people that visited the school in different times, and they always remained impressed by the effortless (easy) and quick way through which the students of her classes were especially prompt to resolve extremely difficult arithmetic problems. There were a lot of these famous people, of whom I only dare mention Mr Tuffnell, Archbishop Errington, Rev Wenham, Col Lefroy, Lord Harrowby, Lord Carlile, Lord Carnarvon, Lord Sandon, Earl Fortescue and Lord Ducie.

Whenever the school was visited, at the times of Governor<sup>2</sup> Sir W. Reid and of his successor Sir Gaspard Le Marchant, by men as distinct as the famous persons mentioned above, the headteacher was highly praised for her ability in directing the school even though she did not boast of this.

Maybe others would have greatly glorified themselves. She was completely against such vanity. She took pleasure only in the good things that her classes obtained; but she did not boast of this. She kept herself humble and modest; devoid of any artificiality. She only praised God and made use of the good that she produced to encourage herself to find ways to double her efforts and obtain better results.' (Pullicino, 1871a, pp. 5-7)

This memoir is important in that it uniquely tells the life story of a Maltese woman teacher in those times and in outlining the official duties of the teacher as well as defining the characteristics of the teacher of that day. The historical and political uses of the memoir are various. A women's history of education would seek to use it to highlight women's participation as educators and to examine the virtues of the nineteenth century woman teacher, a feminist analysis of the memoir would make a critique of women's positions within educational institutions, while a reading of the memoir in a genealogical fashion would critically analyse the formation of the nineteenth century teacher to trace the legacies of the woman teacher as we know her today (Galea, 2002). This paper reflects the interests outlined above in discussing the characteristics of 'a good and pious woman educator' and the ideologies of womanhood at the time the memoir was written. In analysing the spaces conceded to women within educational institutions this paper shall also raise questions related to the spaces created by the publication of the memoir itself, its politics of representation and the possible uses of the space for subversive purposes. In exploring these different spaces I shall be dealing with the actual portrait of the lady as depicted by Pullicino, the feminist places from which it can be interpreted to the imaginary spaces through which the memoir and the legendary Emmanuela can be recreated. I shall take a feminist poststructuralist perspective to explore power, knowledge and gender relations, issues of women's voice and representation to raise and answer questions such as: How are women and

particularly women teachers portrayed in this memoir? What are the roles ascribed to them? What is the political function of the memoir? In whose interest was it published and whose interests does it serve? How can the memoir be used to subvert the colonial and patriarchal interests in portraying women and women teachers as such? Can Emmanuela speak for herself? How?

The feminist poststructuralist perspective taken here will draw on Foucault's reflections on and his uses of the memoir and Spivak's feminist concerns with dominant historical representation of disempowered groups, particularly women, to explore the power positions of women teachers as elite career women and guardians of knowledge; as talking objects and subjects of patriarchal and colonial power and as agents of knowledge. My aim in exploring the theoretical ramifications in coming face to face with Emmanuela echoes Spivak's concern in analysing 'the fabrication of repression, a constructed counter narrative of woman's consciousness, thus woman's being, thus woman's being good, thus the good woman's desire thus the woman's desire' (Spivak, 1988, pp. 304-305).

This paper will give an overview of the historical colonial backgrounds of educational contexts from which the memoir emerges. After analysing the contents of the memoir to present a feminist analysis of Emmanuela's power positions as a woman teacher, I shall move on to a critical analysis of the uses of the memoir itself and its possible uses in culturally representing Emmanuela as a woman teacher.

## **Maltese historical and educational contexts**

Malta became a British colony in the year 1800 and remained so until the 1964. The analysis of Emmanuela's memoir and its manifestations of relations of power, knowledge and gender have to be read within the context of colonial influences, especially those concerning education provision. The British considered Malta an important fortress colony and the Maltese were treated 'not as people but as native inhabitants of the fortress' (Frendo, 1991, p. 5), that is, an Englishman's inferior. Their various ways of controlling the Maltese were authoritarian and intrusive, including forced mass emigration to control the increasing population. Education undoubtedly was one of the important mechanisms deployed by the British to control the Maltese, especially the lower class. Up to this day, our educational system is very much influenced by British educational practices. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the organisation of schooling and the discourses pertaining to education in the UK infiltrated in Malta. What is particular to the analysis of the characteristics of the teacher in Pullicino's memoir is that in the UK, at that time, there was a growing concern about the intellectual and moral

condition of the urban poor and the idea that cheap education could solve the problem. As Jones explains 'it is this concern that mobilises a strategy of schooling to regulate the nomadic, dissolute degenerate and marginal population of the urban slum' (Jones, 1990, pp. 57-58).

Philip Altbach (1971) observes that the educational facilities in the colonies were generally neglected. The same can be said about colonial Malta. An uneducated Maltese population served the British interests in keeping power over them. Yet, at the same time, the British in Malta had to control the professional classes and the clergy who might have harboured ideas of unifying Malta and Italy. The introduction of education of the masses in Malta therefore has to be understood within the context of regulating the lower classes, encouraging them to learn to read and write in their native tongue and the control of the population through emigration. Considering such political tactics it made more sense that those who were in charge of education – the teachers, headteachers and directors – were of low class origins mobilised to form 'a new middle class of educated Maltese acclimatized to the British style [who] came to accept British rule and developed pronounced British loyalties' (Cassar, 1988, p. 121).

This historical background provides an interesting backdrop for exploring Pullicino's need of the memoir to represent a woman teacher. As explained earlier, Pullicino was elevated to high positions in educational hierarchies due to his clear alliances with British control and therefore his position can be described as colonial. In the nineteenth century, political memoirs were quite common and widely circulated. Diaries and memoirs of minor statesmen – such as those of Sir Charles Grenville, a clerk to the Privy Council<sup>3</sup> (1821-1851) – have cast important light on the politics of that particular time. One can only imagine that Pullicino was inspired to use the memoir through his contacts with the Privy Council and must have been particularly impressed by the popularity of the memoir in effectively reaching a large number of readers. However, Pullicino did not write his own memoirs, he did not publish his own life story. Neither did he urge Emmanuela to write out her own memoir. He chose to tell the life story of Emmanuela Azzopardi after her death to enlarge her good and pious qualities and immortalise her saintly nature as an exemplary educator.

In the UK and elsewhere it is highly probable to find documents, diaries and journals or letters written by nineteenth century women teachers themselves. Although one has to be careful not to read too close to these texts in that what is said by these women is sometimes a playful representation of what is acceptable of them, the very presence of these texts show that these texts were given the space to be created and the importance to be preserved. In Malta, up to this day, writings by Maltese women teachers are difficult to find. It is clear that Maltese women teachers,

as Emmanuela, have either not found the space or the political/personal motivations to articulate their visions of education and to represent themselves and their lives as women teachers.

Within such contexts, the political motives of publishing Emmanuela's memoir can be understood more clearly. The voice of Pullicino, a clergy who supports the British colonial cause, is crucial in defining the characteristics of the nineteenth century woman teacher. His social class, religious and gendered positions are well suited to the interests and workings of colonial power that seeks to establish 'consensual' control of the population. The fact that this memoir was written by a man who was picked in 1849 by the Governor and who was a priest directs one's attention to the way various discourses, governmental and religious, worked together to produce the morally good teacher. Above all, it sheds light on the Maltese socio-cultural context and the way certain men were chosen by colonial regimes to dominate the public domain. Such power networks are reflected in the kind of sources, official documents, pamphlets, memoirs, etc. available for historical accounts. Ronald Sultana (2001), in researching technical education in Malta, observes that generally these sources are written by those who see, analyse and interpret events 'from the top'. As he argues,

'In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, seeing events 'from the top', also meant privileging the male voice, so that history of technical education is predominantly a history of male education. As in many areas of life, women remain hidden from 'his/tory' either because the home was considered to be their proper place ... ' (Sultana, 2001, pp. 67-68)

There are other power networks that ensured that men remained at the top controlling the administration of education on the islands. One has to mention that it was in the interest of the British not to oppose Maltese people where religion was concerned. The choice of a priest to formalise, manage and reform primary education was a tactful attempt to employ educational changes in line with the UK without any cause for concern that the public and especially the clergy would object to possible Protestant roots. Paolo Pullicino was the embodiment of the alliances of the two powers and his educational thought and practices brought together these discourses in the game of population control. He also marks the way governmental and religious discourses influence the educational sphere in Malta up to this day. As Joseph Zammit Mangion comments, Pullicino 'must be credited with the foundation of a truly "national system of [popular] education" on modern lines' and 'the Education Department as we know it today' as well as bringing 'to education in Malta an uncommon body of educational theory and lore ... ' (Zammit Mangion, 1992, p. 21)

## The making of the woman teacher

Pullicino made use of different strategies to regularise and manage schools. He chose the physical settings of the schools, organised pupils into classes, and issued detailed timetables for every class, including specifications of content, exercises and books to be used during the lessons (see Pullicino 1871b). Order in primary schools was his prime motive. Even the word 'method' to him was synonymous with order.

1. The word method, Greek in origin, generally means direction and order: applicable and indeed greatly necessary to everything.
2. When used in teaching it signifies order of ideas and words: as well as control of behaviour and work as desirable in school.' (Pullicino, 1858, p. 1; translated from the original Italian by myself)

Teachers were very much the product of this disciplinary mechanism just as their pupils were. They were controlled through the timetabled efficient use of time and through prescribed teaching methods. Such measures, as Foucault observes, induced teaching with an 'obligatory rhythm, imposed from the outside, it is a "programme" it assures the elaboration of the act itself; it controls its development and is staged from the inside' (Foucault, 1991a, p. 152).

Pullicino regularly issued rules of conduct. As an inspector he had the power to observe and control teachers through inspections and pupil examinations. But maybe the most influential way in which Pullicino ensured that his ideas were adhered to and made functional was through his appointment as a professor of primary school pedagogy and the opening of a Training School for assistant teachers. Pullicino's establishment of training schools was done on the lines of Sir James Kay Shuttleworth in the UK, of whom Pullicino was great a follower (Zammit Mangion, 1992, p. 21).

Shuttleworth was the secretary to the Privy Council that, through the establishment of specific training schools in the 1840s, contributed to the formation of the teacher as an ethical model to the urban classes. As Jones (1990, pp. 62-63) remarks, the training consisted in technologies of the transformation of the teachers' selves, men's or women's, into modest, humble persons who forget themselves in the service of others.

Pullicino's memoir shows an enactment of Shuttleworth's ideal teacher who is moral, virtuous, humble, modest and tame. This dedication to one particular woman teacher is clearly directed to set an exemplary behaviour for other women teachers. Pullicino's description of the ideal woman teacher, in fact, emphasises her subordination to her superiors, praising her for the reproduction of instructions and regulations set by Pullicino himself. However, such qualities and attitudes, as

I will argue again later on, were not only expected of women. The teacher's readiness to obey, which is mentioned in Pullicino's memoir, also features as one of Shuttleworth's general prerogatives in teachers' training and self-formation. Furthermore, the importance given to teachers' obedience and compliance to established rules and methods of teaching rather than their knowledge of subjects is common to both Pullicino's as well as Shuttleworth's ideal of the teacher. In the next section, I shall explain how women become the prime vehicles of pastoral power and how they gradually substituted the predominantly masculine authoritarian teaching styles when they increasingly took up men's places in schools.

### **The woman teacher as the pastoral carer**

It is very clear that such maternal characteristics are particularly expected of women teachers. Emmanuela Azzopardi did not only epitomise Pullicino's vision of the perfect teacher but also that of the perfect woman and mother. The hierarchical arrangement of the relationship between Pullicino the director and inspector, Azzopardi the teacher and her pupils is parallel to the familial relations between father, mother and children. This, once again, recalls the image of the Victorian<sup>4</sup> family and that of the mother as the teacher of virtue of her children.

Moreover, Pullicino's processes of making and regulating the teacher in the nineteenth century functioned as a way to normalise family life, especially that of the lower classes. The teacher, at this point, comes to be perceived as a model substitute parent. It is here that the maternal characteristics of the woman teacher are exploited and that the link between the mother and teacher is mostly evident. Her subtle gentleness, love and caring together with her moral excellence, virtuosity and asexuality, which are also the qualities that this memoir highlights, are actually the prevalent qualities of the mother in the Victorian era (Thurer, 1994, pp. 182-287). These maternal characteristics were gradually transferred to the woman teacher when the socialisation of children was taken over by public institutions.

The description of Emmanuela Azzopardi as the mother and the teacher of virtue stems from Pullicino's religious background. But the description was particularly acceptable because, as Thurer explains, in the late nineteenth century the mother was the secular version of the Virgin Mary. She was put on a pedestal, considered the angel of the house because of her important social role of teaching virtue to her children. Emmanuela Azzopardi's characteristics, at least those mentioned by Pullicino, and the general image of the good teacher promoted by discourses of teacher training are remarkably close to the ideal Victorian mother.

Emmanuela's role as a teacher overlapped with the duties of the mother to compensate for the lack of moral education of children by their parents. Pullicino's description of Azzopardi shows that teaching gradually diffused into the territory of parenting, especially where working class 'wild' children were concerned.

'She gave a lot of thought to moral education. She used to try and educate her students in religious practices. These should not only be studied in School during Catechism but also practised by doing religious duties. And she attended to this in a serious manner and made her students account for their religious practices. Teachers who wish that their School is not only a means of instruction but a strong foundation for the best moral education should do the same thing. She did not say that parents should provide for this. In the case of public elementary schools, mostly attended by daughters of working class persons, they should provide for all the needs of these girls; whose religious education is greatly neglected if not opposed by the parents themselves. The School therefore should compensate for this lack. Otherwise those instructresses who do not provide for this produce badly and half educated students from their schools.' (Pullicino, 1871a, p. 11)

## Investigating the memoir

The memoir is a useful source for an analysis of the way women teachers are constructed as subjects and objects of knowledge and the powerful/powerless positions they hold as women and teachers in the dissemination of patriarchal and colonial ideologies through the teaching of the young. It features as one of the important sources for an analysis of the power relations through which persons are constructed within particular historical socio-cultural contexts. The memoir as a historical document outlines the discourses and knowledges formed at particular times and places, and especially how these define individuals, prescribe and ascribe their roles.

Michel Foucault is especially known for using memoirs to show how power structures and institutional discourses are used and reformed to create subjectivities. My search in historical documents and finding Pullicino's *A Little Memoir of the Life of a Good and Pious Woman Educator* has been inspired by a similar Foucaultian quest to trace the formation of discourses about women, and teachers in particular, and the social uses of their particular roles as carers of the young. This methodology, which is termed genealogy, is different from the usual ways of doing history. Genealogy relies on historical data and facts in the archive, but the aim is not that of a conventional history which aims to give a story of progress and development of some idea or practice. It hints at the possible spaces that created certain discourses which formed certain subjects (Foucault, 1984).



This interest in genealogy, as Foucault himself describes it, is a critical concern with the history of the present in that it seeks to trace the conditions, the spaces out of which discourses and persons with particular characteristics could be created.

‘Here too the investigation makes use of “true” documents, but in such a way as to furnish not just the evidence of truth but also an experience that might permit an alteration, a transformation, of the relationship we have with ourselves, our cultural universe: in a word with our knowledge (savoir).’ (Foucault, 1991b, p. 37)

Foucault as a genealogist makes an archaeological use of the same raw materials of the historian – archives, chronicles, memoirs, dairies, journals and official records. However, he makes different use of them when he seeks to trace the way discourses have been shaped to affect our present lives. As a genealogist, he presents an interpretation of why certain things take the shape they have. But what is of particular interest to this paper is his use of memoirs and his reflections and deliberations on the way they could be presented to the reader. It is clear that his use of the memoirs of Pierre Rivière (see Foucault, 1975) and Herculine Barbin (see Foucault, 1980a) is guided by his broader genealogical interests in tracing the formations of subjectivities; abnormalised and normalised ones.

Foucault’s particular focus on the lives of persons considered to deviate from the norm – Pierre Rivière, a 16 year-old boy who killed his mother, brother and sister and Herculine Barbin, a hermaphrodite – is not driven by a curiosity of how these persons lived but by how their lives were judged through their very representations. Foucault’s use of memoirs and documents are not aimed to monumentalise the persons and their lives, but to analyse the documents in a way to shed light on the way persons were conveyed through these writings. A genealogical interest in these texts demands an active reading of the texts; one which is open to interpretation of the readers. In fact, Foucault struggled with how these texts could be presented to the reader and with the question of how Pierre Rivière or Herculine Barbin would be allowed to speak, and how readers could come up with their own readings of the memoir. Foucault, in his introduction to Pierre Rivière, explains that documents and memoirs are to be analysed because ‘they give us a key to the relations of power, domination and conflict within which discourses emerge and function and hence provide material for a potential analysis of discourse which may be both tactical and political and therefore strategic’ (Foucault, 1975, pp. xi-xii).

Surprisingly, Foucault does not analyse or interpret the document. Foucault himself admits that the memoir could have been used to bring out the discourses that have lead to a definition of madness or to consider Barbin or Rivière as examples of their own kind. In ‘Lives of Infamous Men’, Foucault (2001) writes of his

indecisions regarding the use of the documents he came across. Clearly he considered these archives too important not to get them published, but in this introduction he again expresses his concern about whether to actually reproduce them as they appear originally or include an accompanying analysis. Nevertheless, Foucault's writings about his own investigations of these documents are significant to the discussion related to an analysis of Emmanuela's memoir and the use of this memoir. Foucault's documents are different from Pullicino's memoir of Emmanuela in that they are not used to represent exemplary lives. On the contrary, if any lesson is to be learnt this is that the bad, scandalous and impious are to be restrained and that they are to remain infamous. Nevertheless, Emmanuela and the persons in Foucault's documents have had a similar fate; it is their relations with power that ensured our knowledge of their existence today. As Foucault explains

'But in order for some part to reach us, a beam of light had to illuminate them, for a moment at least. A light coming from elsewhere. What snatched them from the darkness in which they could, perhaps should have remained was the encounter with power, without that collision, its very unlikely that any word would be there to recall their fleeting trajectory ... All those lives destined to pass beneath any discourse and disappear without ever having been told were able to leave traces – brief incisive, often enigmatic – only at the point of their instantaneous contact with power. So that it is doubtless impossible ever to grasp them again in themselves, as they might have been "in a free state", they can no longer be separated out from the declamations, the tactical biases, the obligatory lies that power relations and power games presuppose.' (Foucault, 2001, p. 161)

## **The two faces of the memoir**

The memoir is an ambiguous piece of writing considered from a feminist perspective. This is because the memoir seeks to place the woman teacher within the public sphere in a different way from statistics, registries and records. The memoir which is more of the biographical type taking the form of a life history delves into the personal realm – something which is all the more relevant to a feminist that reads the personal as political. The memoir places Emmanuela within the public sphere, it symbolises the particular work of women within socio-cultural domain; a task that feminists today are very much concerned with. Furthermore, the memoir is the first we know that seeks to describe a Maltese teacher and her life in such detail. Stories of Maltese teachers have largely been ignored and are still very much unknown. The memoir therefore is a witness of her existence. It is through this writing that we get to know of Emmanuel Azzopardi.

The problem with the memoir is that we never get to know her in her own terms. Foucault's considerations in using the memoir are inspired by his aim to insurrect subjugated knowledges, that is, 'a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their own task or insufficiently elaborated; naïve knowledges located down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity' (Foucault, 1980b, p. 82). Emmanuela's memoir remains subjugated. She is never allowed to paint her own self-portrait; she is never allowed to be presented in a 'free state' as Foucault would have it. In this respect, Emmanuela's memoir is different from that of Pierre Rivière and Herculine Barbin in that the latter are written by the authors themselves and get the space to be able to articulate their own versions of the events, their own interpretations of their lives. This does not mean that Pierre Rivière's interpretations of his own story are not subjected to the discourses that construct him as a murderer. Foucault (1975) himself uses their memoirs to explain the way discourses create a typical portrait of the murderer.

Nevertheless, one can say that Emmanuela's memoir undercuts the democratic attempts at making the unknown known because Emmanuela never gets to speak. We never hear her voice. We formulate our own visions of her through the gaze of a colonised elite whose interpretive techniques were informed by patriarchal, religious and imperial thinking.

The ambiguous and contradictory political functions of the memoir can be understood if compared to ambivalent uses of a veil. The memoir can be considered a veil that hides 'the real woman' underneath, but it is through the veil itself that the woman is made and can make herself an active subject. The woman is conspicuous and invisible both at the same time. The veil is preoccupying for those who see it as annihilating women's possibilities of representing their selves just as the difficulties in finding texts written by women and women teachers themselves make one concerned with the oppressive and silencing characteristics of the memoir. Nevertheless, this invisibility of the woman is what ironically marks her existence and raises, as has been done in earlier sections, the feminist political interest in analysing the way she is portrayed.

Through Western eyes the veil is oppressively hiding the woman just as the memoir does, but through the veil the woman can still observe the world without being observed. The memoir is the way through which Emmanuela 'sees' the world, allowing us only to guess what she looked like, making us struggle to imagine who she is beyond the veiling memoir. Pullicino's memoir, in a similar fashion, instigates the reversal of the power of the patriarchal gaze and the political enterprise of possibly reinventing the woman that Pullicino has created and imaging the world as observed by her.

## Speaking for Emmanuela

The contents of the memoir itself illustrate the social expectations from women and their domestication in these roles. But they also illustrate the need of the colonial elite to make them public and accessible to a particular kind of audience which understands Italian and curious enough to know details of her life and character. Obviously, Emmanuela Azzopardi had no say in what was written about her life at home and at school since this memoir was in fact written a few months after she died. But it is easy for one to assume, considering the type of discipline she was subjected to and the particular life contexts, that she would not have objected, at least publicly, to what was written about her. This memoir shows a mode of disciplining women teachers which is not coercive. It is more a technology of the self where women teachers are expected 'to perfect themselves and make themselves of more value to the noble mission that they have consecrated themselves to' (Pullicino, 1871a, p. 1).

The power relations of not letting women speak on their own behalf portray the gendered relations between the powerful Director of Education and the obedient woman teacher; the speaking knowledgeable creating subject and the spoken created agent of the reproduction of knowledge. The simple social equation between the powerful man and the woman – a male priest director and a woman teacher – becomes more complicated if one brings in the scenes of colonial discourses and educational machines to foreground the equation.

Postcolonial texts such as Spivak's have critically analysed the complex patriarchal relations between coloniser, colonised men and women, pinpointing at how colonisers see themselves as saving indigenous women from the misery of remaining oppressively silenced. Colonisers do this by allowing them spaces not conceded to them by their native husbands. The memoir can be also read within this spirit. Pullicino is the native man, both colonised and coloniser, who uses the gendered spaces allowed to him by a combination of native and colonial discourses to define or redefine women in education. Pullicino saves Emmanuela from remaining nameless, but he benevolently names her through colonial languages that are conceded to him to construct her feminine identity as a woman and educator.

Spivak (1988, 1999) explains, in her analysis of the appearance of colonised women in the archive, that woman emerges only when she is needed in the space of imperial production. In other words, the values given to her are colonial and patriarchal ones. Spivak makes this comment when she describes the ways by which colonisers go against the traditional patriarchal to appear the benevolent saviours of women accustomed to commit sati.<sup>5</sup>

When one reads the memoir in the light of Spivak's account of the power relations of the practices of sati, one immediately realises that it is the space created through the colonial needs of the memoir that saves Emmanuela from her eternal death. On the other hand, just as women commit sati to be remembered as honourable women, here again, ironically, it is her death that ensures her living memory. One would argue that she would rather be dead than living a dead life. But that would be the perspective of a Western feminist reader who is interested in the task of reviving the dead woman through the subversive and imaginative reading of the memoir – a recreation of a life that could have been.

## **Speaking as Emmanuela**

Would Emmanuela have described her mission in the same ways as Pullicino does? What would she have said about herself and about Pullicino? What if one managed to peep into her very secret diaries? What portraits would emerge from the meanings she gave to her life as a woman and teacher? What subjugated knowledges would have been unveiled?

Feminists, such as Donna Haraway (1988), would raise the question of what representing herself in her own terms means; noting that even if she were allowed to paint her own portrait, she might have used the techniques of representation and the images that would have made her acceptable.

This echoes Spivak's critique of the Subaltern Studies historians group whose aim was to recuperate the political voice, will and agency of the subaltern. Spivak (1988) objects to the idea that the subaltern is a free being in full control of her own destiny and that even their subjugated knowledges are tainted by dominant discourses. Sovereign subaltern subject is an effect of the dominant discourse of the elite.

In this sense, any knowledge derived from a self-portrait would need to be read within the situations and contextual positions – that is, patriarchal and colonial – in which Emmanuela would have described herself as a woman and a teacher. As Scott (1992, p. 37) points out, the simple reproduction of women's experience has little value if it does not explore the historical and social contexts in which it is produced. And this marks another aspect in analysing the power/knowledge networks of representing Emmanuela; the presence of the theorist and her unavoidable need of her analysing and scrutinising gaze.

Subjugated knowledges are involved in processes of interpretations and these interpretations, as Haraway (1988) explains, are always partial and limited.

The very standpoints of the subjugated (Harstock, 1990) cannot be understood as having a direct relation to the truth. They are situated knowledges – localised and contextualised.

## Face to face with Emmanuela?

This paper is concerned with the possibilities of unveiling Emmanuela, a process which is undoubtedly inspired by Western feminist emancipatory methodological principles of giving voice to women and of reading their experiences as products of their particular contexts; of coming face to face with them. In pondering on the possibilities of reviving the lady, on considering the uses of imagination and fiction in creating a portrait, one important question remains.

Can we have a subaltern reading of Emmanuela's life? Is it possible to have a reading and a reinvention of her life which subverts the patriarchal, colonial definitions that have represented her in the first place?

A fictional subversive reading of her life would satisfy the desires of coming face to face with someone, an unknown and hidden other. But, yet again, feminist desires of such political strategies themselves continue to be part of an entangled web of power and knowledge that involved women's relations among themselves. And with contexts, however adverse, that make their representation possible.

Spivak's (1993) work can again throw some light on this debate. Her criticism of the French feminist Kristeva's ways of presenting Chinese women makes one reflect on the unexpected and politically incorrect outcomes of such endeavours. Spivak (1993) argues that Kristeva, in her book *About Chinese Women*, rather than representing Chinese women with their particular diverse culture, ends up explaining them through her own frames of thought grounded in her French feminist theoretical baggage.

Spivak critiques Kristeva for being self-centred and for her inability to let the subaltern speak. Spivak argues that Western feminist attempts to describe the other always include a reading of their own selves and a projection of their own selves and their own history and cultures on to others. The theorist that seeks to revive Emmanuela runs a similar risk of creating a portrait of their own selves as women and teachers. Nevertheless, the risk can be taken consciously as one cannot step out of those discourses which make her who she is in the first place. Kristeva may be wrong in reading Chinese women's lives without seriously taking their cultural contexts and their history in consideration. But, as Spivak herself has argued, neither can Chinese women's speech as that of a subaltern group be considered as untainted from powerful dominant discourses. In such instances, the reading of the lives of others can never escape a reading of our own lives. Coming face to face with the

other necessitates coming face to face with ourselves and reading ourselves in a critical manner – as if we are outsiders to ourselves. A critical reading of history, which involves reading and interpreting stories about others, helps us understand ourselves as we have become today, opening possibilities of creating ourselves differently.

The memoir is a dangerous terrain to tread on. It is a labyrinth of power networks in which one finds oneself easily captured. Yet, it can be read as a space from which one can emerge differently. It is the experience itself of being in the labyrinth that makes it possible to emerge, and therefore the emergence has to be read and invented within readings of various contexts; theoretical, social cultural, political and historical.

There can be imaginative attempts to vindicate the silenced voice of Emmanuela. A feminist has to be inspired by the memoir – and see it as an ambivalent space from which women educators can possibly emerge. She can paint the portrait as Emmanuela, but as she does so she would also paint her own portrait; who she is, who she has become. Coming face to face with Emmanuela necessitates coming face to face with oneself.

## Notes

1. Pulicino wrote the memoir in Italian. I translated into English the excerpts that appear in the paper.
2. In the British Empire, the Governor was an official appointed by the British Monarch (or, in fact, the cabinet) to oversee the running of a particular colony. As such, he was the head of the local colonial administration.
3. The Privy Council was originally a committee of the closest advisors of the British Monarch who could give him or her advice on affairs of state.
4. The Victorian era, which refers to the period of Queen Victoria's rule between 1837 and 1901, marks the height of the British industrial revolution and the apex of the British Empire. This period has been defined by a variety of sensibilities and political concerns that have come to be associated with the Victorians.
5. Sati is a Hindu funeral custom, now very rare, in which the dead man's widow commits suicide by throwing herself on her husband's burning funeral pyre.

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